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DEVELOPING PROJECT WORK
IN SOCIOLOGY AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION //

Have you been thinking about sociology and community organization in your State extension work? Quite a few States are. Some are hoping to set up new projects along this line while others want to strengthen what they already have. They believe that it will help them to better serve their own extension staffs and the people, in light of new extension developments and new trends. The purpose of this statement is to help you think about this matter.

Situation

Sociology concepts and skills will be especially important during the next 10 years, in order to help make extension as effective as possible and in order to best serve the people on community problems. You know that there is lots of interest today in the family, the community, and the group as teaching units; in better program building; in more effective teaching; in more development of leadership; in making organizations and communities better; in teamwork between agencies; in organizing and training for new programs so they will be most effective; in community welfare and public affairs.

TRENDS - CHANGES Today we face numerous problems and conditions and have to do with human relations, groups, organization activities, and community living. Rural life has been changing and this affects family life, churches, schools, recreation, and extension methods. Rural organizations and clubs of various kinds want to strengthen their programs and increase participation. In some communities there is a need for more adequate services, such as for health or recreation, while in other places people want to use more of what they already have. New developments also bring methods which have to be kept up-to-date in order to make extension as successful as possible. There are important social aspects in stepping up work on farm and home planning and public affairs, too, which must not be overlooked if these are to ultimately succeed.

Extension is basically concerned with people. First of all we deal with people in doing extension work, and secondly, we know that the development of people and better living is extension's basic objective. We are challenged today to reach more people, to serve young people, to serve families, to lift standards, to increase personal development for greater happiness and mental health, to develop leadership and organization for people doing more for themselves.

Practical information in the field of sociology, organization and leadership is now becoming more and more available than ever before. Projects in this field can and should contribute to such problems for the benefit of both staff members and the people.

General Content, Problems, Objectives

Below are main areas of subject matter contained in sociology and community organization. Of course, State programs vary somewhat depending on their different situations.

1. Leadership development. This includes the enlisting of leaders, working with leaders, teaching and helping leaders to do their jobs better. It applies to community leaders and officers of all kinds including those in home demonstration, 4-H and other groups. It also includes helping extension agents to understand their proper roles as professional leaders and help develop their skills in working with groups and volunteer leaders.

Volunteer leadership has always been a keystone of extension work. Thus the development of leadership is a constant need. We have many volunteer leaders and need more, and they would appreciate help in doing their leadership jobs better. This in turn would strengthen organizations and programs as well as contribute to the personal development of the leaders themselves.

2. Community development. This deals with self analysis and problem solving, community improvement and neighborhood progress programs, town-country relations, community services such as for health and recreation, and building teamwork among groups and agencies in their work on community problems and carrying on farm and community improving activities. Community organization, both for meeting community problems and for doing better extension work, has made great strides forward in the southern States during the last 10 years, under the leadership of the extension services and town commercial groups.

Probably every community in the United States has one or more problems or needs of some kind. It might be inadequate health services, or lack of recreation opportunities for youth, or poor town-country relations, or weak churches or civic organizations, or poor roads, or a school consolidation problem. These are just as important to rural families as better farming. Extension works on the idea of communities solving their own problems. This idea is being emphasized more and more throughout the United States today and it is significant for these times. But communities need and want help in knowing how.

3. Organization and Group Methods. This includes helping organizations and groups to be more effective; techniques for good meetings, good committees, good discussion methods, problems of co-op membership relations, effective use of family and group approaches in extension work.

Millions of man-hours are wasted annually because of poor meetings or other ineffective group activities. Many organizations do not have the quality programs that they could or should have. Oftentimes particular activities or programs fail or turn out poorly because of not being set up as soundly as they should have been. Skills in leading discussions and in helping groups think together will be especially important in the new family-farm unit and public affairs emphases of extension work during the next 10 years.

How to make program building methods work better is also a common problem of extension organization, leadership and group method. How shall we organize for program planning, how often should we meet, how should we handle planning group meetings to get more group participation, how can we better determine the true interests and needs of the people, are our program planning methods doing what we want them to do? How can we best analyze local situations, what to do about community welfare problems that come up, and what other resources are available? All these are basic questions that extension workers and leaders want help on.

4. General Sociology information and viewpoint. This includes data and interpretations on such things as population trends, community changes, standards of living, public affairs, social aspects of public policies and issues, family and community life.

We need to continually supply up-to-date information to extension workers and to community leaders on these subjects, for it is very valuable to extension program planning and to farming and community life. Families want to know more about the things beyond the fence lines that affect their farming and living both at home and in the community.

Many extension agents also like to know more about the sociology of their counties - the social groupings, leadership patterns and cultural values - so they can revise their programs and methods accordingly and work more effectively with more of the people for greater service. For examples, many counties are made up of two or more cultural backgrounds or have peculiar human relations in other ways which greatly affect how they must be worked with. More part-time farmers are also springing up in many sections.

Organization and leadership are basic tools in extension work for furthering programs. They have to be continually oiled, repaired, and remodeled, not taken for granted. We have to give as much attention to organization and leadership as to program subject matter, if we want a program to ultimately succeed.

A function of extension sociology is also to help keep the human viewpoint and the importance of social consciousness before extension workers and the people. This is especially important today as we undertake new emphasis on individual service and on public affairs. This should not lead us toward too much individual viewpoints when today we need to teach group consciousness and use group motivations and work with other agencies who also have concerns in the same subjects. What are we going to teach families that will be of lasting value, and so that it will last?

Specialist Activities and Services

The content and activities of extension sociology and community organization fall into two main types. These are:

- ❶ EXTENSION STAFF TRAINING AND SERVICE. Extension workers deal with people in doing extension work, not with commodities.
- ❷ CITIZEN TRAINING AND SERVICE. We are interested in community living too.

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Some typical and suitable activities⁻⁴⁻ of specialists are listed below. These may fall into either one of the above types.

1. Assist with State and district staff-training programs--regular conferences, special trainings, in-service and pre-service courses.
2. Leadership schools or clinics; discussion method training meetings.
3. Counsel and case service to individuals, groups, committees, county staffs.
4. County community life institutes or roundtables bringing together voluntary groups, agencies, organizations, and local business people.
5. Community inventories, health studies, and other surveys.
6. State rural church or pastor's conferences.
7. News items, radio and TV broadcasts.
8. Leaflets and bulletins.
9. Cooperate with research and resident teaching.
10. Assist with evaluations of group teaching activities and leadership.

Administrative Aspects

1. Most of all, extension sociology and community organization should be in a position which will permit working across the board. Because so much of its content and activities relate to other phases of extension work, sociology is not entirely a project program for counties to carry parallel and similar to other subject projects, but rather is a service for the use of the staff and other agencies.

2. We believe that it is also best to keep it separated in action from recreation. This is because through the years extension recreation programs were sometimes carried on under the name of rural sociology which led many extension people to think of the two as the same thing. Of course, sociology may assist the recreation program just as it cooperates with any other project. And it may be officed with recreation and be under the same administrative head. But the sociologist should not do much recreation as such, nor should the recreation specialist have the title of sociologist as such. For these two things will cause sociology to be defined as recreation in the minds of extension workers and thereby limit sociology's service to the staff and the people, and also restrict the development of the extension recreation program. The same is true of other projects or lines of work like health and YMW program; they should not be tied in under the name of sociology. If a project or program of a particular person is to be in two lines, use both in the title of project and title of specialist.

3. Next in importance is that sociology and community organization should be in a position to relate closely with research and resident teaching. Probably it is better for it to be in the college of agriculture in order to facilitate working with extension and the experiment station. If at all possible, extension sociologists should also have some part in researches.

4. The title of an extension project in this field and the specialist may be sociobgy, rural sociology, community organization or some other appropriate title. If the same person is going to be also doing considerable work along a different line, then that should be in his title, too. If any combining has to be done, such as in small colleges or beginning projects, try to combine closely related subjects with sociology, such as family life or health organization, rather than programs like recreation, crafts or YMW work.

Personnel Aspects

1. The specialist or project leader in extension sociology and community organization should have considerable definite graduate training in this subject or be going to get it soon. And, of course, extension experience or aptitude also is of tremendous importance. A main thing is to not simply change the title of some other extension worker to sociologist or community organization specialist and think that you have one. It would not be fair to him or to the rest of the staff and community leaders with whom he would have to work.

2. Permit and encourage in-service training and professional improvement.

3. The director should discuss the job and work with the new specialist a great deal in the beginning. Then advise with and use him; facilitate working relations for him with others; announce and explain what his position is and what the work will be. Support him as warranted. Ask the Federal office for assistance as needed.

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